

[SELF CARE] THE ART OF ACUPRESSURE POINTS AND YOGA STRETCH

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A stronger you is created by you taking care of yourself—the body, mind and spirit you.

I am often asked by clients, “What can I do to take care of myself between massage sessions?” One of my first suggestions is yoga—an ancient art that began in India. Yoga cultivates health and well being (physical, emotional, mental, and social) through regular practice of different techniques that include stretches, postures and movement, deep breathing, relaxation, concentration, self-awareness, and meditation.

Another way to take care of you is through self-acupressure. Acupressure is an ancient healing art that dates back to China more than 5,000 years ago and has been shown to affect the body by way of meridians (energy pathways) located throughout the body.

The points located on these meridians (acupressure points) have been shown to increase circulation and improve the flow of chi (energy) to the muscles and organs to benefit one's health and well being. You can apply pressure to acupressure points with the fingers, thumbs, knuckles, or tools such as knobbles or stones. You can use acupressure on others as well as on yourself.



The benefits of regular practice of both yoga and acupressure can improve one's health in so many ways from relief of headaches and sinus problems to decreased swelling in the face and extremities to relieving tension and pain in the neck back, shoulders, and sciatica areas. The benefits are numerous and amazing—and there is a way to combine the two into one practice. It is called Acu-Yoga.

Understanding Acu-Yoga

Acu-Yoga combines the art of pressing on pertinent acupressure points while maintaining a yoga stretch at the same time (also called asanas). For instance, in a standing position, draw an imaginary line from your belly button back to your spine and from the spine bring your fingers lateral about two finger widths. This is an acupressure point called B23 (23rd point on the bladder meridian).

Now move your fingers lateral another two finger-widths to hold the B47 points. All of these points can help relieve low back and sciatica pain and they also benefit the kidneys. Now choose one set of these points to hold with your thumbs while resting your fingers on your waist.

Take a deep breath in and as you exhale gently lean backward into a slight backbend. You are performing a yoga pose called camel and applying acupressure at the same time. How extraordinary it is to perform both of these ancient arts together for added healing benefits to these areas.

Another way to hold these points is to put two tennis balls (or golf balls for extra pressure) into a sock. Be sure you separate the tennis balls so they fit directly on either side of the spine onto these points. You may want to lean back carefully and slowly because sometimes the pressure can be a bit intense and so you can get use to pressure gradually. Once you are lying flat on your back with the tennis balls situated on these points, bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor. Gently rock back and forth to sink deeper into the pressure and to massage the low

back. You can also bring your legs up one at a time, knee to arm pit and then back to the floor, for added work on the inner thigh and abdomen.

Regular Practice of Acu-Yoga

Regular practice can not only improve the flow of blood circulation and chi it can also improve flexibility, reduce stress and trauma, relax muscular tension, correct the posture, increase body awareness, and awaken spirituality and peace of mind.

Another Acu-Yoga pose is called squat pose and it is effective to open the hips. Stand with your feet a little more than hip-width apart; bend your knees until you are in the lowest squat position that you can maintain comfortably. Place your elbows on the inside of your knees and push your palms together at the heart/breastbone level. Raise your chest upward toward the sky.

As you hold this pose allow your thumbs to rest on the centerline of your chest/breastbone and apply pressure. This point is called CV17 (Conception Vessel Meridian) and it is effective to open the chest and lungs, help relieve coughs and heartburn, and is also a point to help one release suppressed emotions. Hold the pose for 30 seconds and then repeat if desired.

Feel like you need a break? Make your way into child's pose by sitting on your heels and slowly lowering your body until your forehead touches the floor and allowing your hands to rest by your sides. When you sit in this position you stimulate the stomach meridian points that run up the front of the legs, through the right chest into the face to the hairline.

There are numerous acupressure points you can press while holding child's pose, including the third eye point at the bridge of the nose. This pose also stretches out the lungs and upper back while draining the sinuses.

To enhance the pose clasp your hands together behind your back and stretch to relieve tension in the neck and shoulders. This not only opens up the thoracic area, but it also stimulates breathing points in the chest and upper back which helps combat colds and flues.

Ending Your Yoga Practice

There are several ways to end an Acu-Yoga session.

One is in the final relaxation or corpse pose where you're lying flat on your back with your legs outstretched and arms by your side, taking deep slow breaths, and just lying there for about 10

minutes. In this position there are numerous acupressure points to hold along the conception vessel meridian (directly down the midline of the torso), such as the CV12 (solar plexus) point.

To find this point place your hands in the center under your ribs on either side then move your hands medial until they meet along the center mid-line of the body. Holding this point helps rid suppressed tension in the abdomen and can also help relieve indigestion and heartburn.

You can also end an Acu-Yoga session in a comfortable cross-leg sitting position. There are numerous points within easy reach to press while in this position.

One recommendation is the LU1 (lung meridian) point. To find LU1, cross your arms and place your hands underneath your armpits and notice where your thumbs land—right at the shoulder joint. LU1 is a breathing point, so be sure to continue taking long slow deep relaxing breaths. It is also a meditation point called “letting go.” As you wind down your Acu-Yoga session continue to affirm, “I am letting go.”

Learning Acu-Yoga

You can order books or flashcards or you may attend a live class or follow a step-by-step guide on a DVD. There are countless yoga poses to learn for every muscle group in the body—and there are more than 365 acupressure points located throughout the body (that’s at least one a day).

Acupressure flashcards and meridian/point charts are also helpful in learning to apply pressure to acupressure points.

It doesn’t take long to do an Acu-Yoga session. You can practice anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour based on your timeframe or you can break it up into shorter sessions throughout the day.

If you’re feeling especially stressed, I’d recommend practicing about 10 minutes before starting a bodywork session. It will keep you centered and alert and more in-tune with yourself and your client.

Taking Care of the Inner You

As practitioners, we must take care of ourselves—mentally and physically and spiritually. Clients look to us for stress relief and often for motivation in making healthy lifestyle changes. They expect us to be examples of self-care and to practice what we preach.

It is easy to become too involved with work and helping others and neglect our own needs. But a healthy you is a better you in every way—at work, at home and at play. The healthy you can take better care of your family and your clients if you help others from a place of inner fullness rather than from a place of drain and fatigue.

So schedule that massage and facial and spa day for yourself and feel good about it—and oh yes, don't forget to practice Acu-Yoga daily for greater flexibility and peace of mind. After all the healthy you can work better and more effectively with a flexible body and a relaxed mind.